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ABSTRACT

This learning unit on taking decisions is one in the Choice Series, a self-learning development program for supervisors. Purpose stated for the approximately eight-hour-long unit is to enable the supervisor to apply good principles of problem solving and making decisions so that his/her workteam is able to be, and to stay, productive. An introduction provides an overview of the unit and lists unit objectives. Parts A through E contain informative material, activities and answer keys, self-checks and answer keys, and a summary. Topics include taking decisions at work, information for decision taking, risks involved in taking decisions, six stages in problem solving, and checklists for taking decisions. Part F contains performance checks--an end check to be completed alone and a tutor check and work-based project. Part G consists of a brief unit review, extensions (print sources of additional information, such as units or sections in books), and a list of references. (YLB)

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An Open Tech Project

SUPERVISING

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF SUPERVISION

20: Taking Decisions

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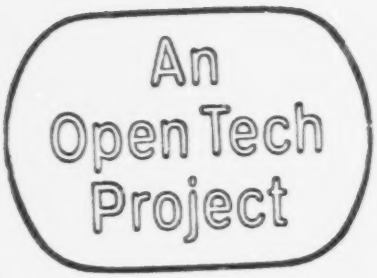
20: TAKING DECISIONS

William Tait



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William Tait
Taking Decisions (20 in the CHOICE SERIES of learning units)

Series Editor: Harry V Pardue
Northern Regional Management Centre

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WORKING GUIDE TO THIS UNIT IN YOUR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

This Unit is now your personal property - it's not for handing back to your training officer or to a tutor. It is your working book.

The Contents will increase in value to you each time you write on one of its pages. This is a working text for your personal notes - without notes its value is limited.

Qualifications forget about certificates and diplomas - you don't need them for this programme. What you do need is the wish:-

* to do your job better
* for personal development

Your study time is really up to you - we guess you will need about 8 hours in total. But it's your time - spend as long as you like.

How am I doing? you can judge for yourself by checking out how well you cope with the tasks we call Activities and Self Checks which occur throughout the unit. You can also get the Tutor Check and/or the Work Based Project to your tutor for an unbiased view of your progress.

Work Pace it's really up to you and depends on your interest. However, if you do well on the Activities and Self Checks, you could afford to speed up a little. Of course, if you don't do as well as you expect then you could slow down a little or flick back into the unit for a quick review of the more difficult ideas.

When in doubt - ask or seek help from:

* your family and friends
* colleagues at work
* your company training staff
* other open learners
* your tutor, by phone, by a visit to your support centre or by dropping your tutor a line through the post.

Don't worry if what you learn doesn't seem to be of use to you now, remember that times change - it may be useful one day. Anyway, just knowing more improves personal confidence.

So now make a start:-

20: TAKING DECISIONS by William Tait

ABOUT THIS UNIT

An important feature of the job of a supervisor is taking decisions which will affect the performance and output of the workteam you lead. The extent to which you take decisions will vary according to how routine are the tasks you and your workteam carry out, but, there will be times where you will need to take and implement decisions in order to do your job effectively.

We have some information and theory available to us about TAKING DECISIONS and PROBLEM SOLVING. This helps us to develop sound ideas on how we can take decisions affecting our workteams with every chance of success.

This unit should help you to apply good principles of problem solving and taking decisions so that your workteam is able to be, and to stay, productive.

IN THIS UNIT WE WILL:

* identify your role in taking decisions
* discuss the influences upon your decisions from inside and outside the organisation
* identify a method for solving problems
* identify a method for taking decisions

Audio Tape Side 1

Before you continue through the unit, you should now listen to Side 1 of the audio tape that accompanies this unit. You will find it useful if you refer to the unit objectives shown below whilst you listen to the tape. You may wish to make the objectives clearer to yourself by making a note or two on this page as you listen.

OBJECTIVES

When you have worked through this unit you will be BETTER ABLE TO:

* understand your function as a decision taker in your workplace
* list the main items of information which will influence the decisions you take
* work through a method for solving problems
* take and implement decisions in a way that increases your effectiveness.

1 Introduction

In this part of the unit we will investigate why a supevisor needs to take decisions.

EXTENSION 1
Page 55

2 The Team Leader as a Decision Taker

It was going to be a rotten weekend. On Friday afternoon I had been called in by my manager and told that I would need to draw up new work rotas for my workteam. The new machines we were getting for my section at the end of the month were to be worked in pairs and operated by teams of three people.

Of course, I had known we were going to get the new equipment and that the trade union involved had agreed to it, but, I hadn't realised until now that new manning arrangements would be needed. The revised arrangements, my manager told me, would need to be ready by next Wednesday and communicated to my workteam and their representatives on the following Friday.

My workteam consisted of 28 people; 16 men and 12 women. They currently work in pairs and these pairs, in the majority of cases, had worked happily together for two years or more. So I seemed to have a number of problems in drawing up my new work rota.

ACTIVITY 1
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two of the problems I would have to deal with in drawing up a new work rota.

* _____

_____

* _____

_____

You may have thought of any number but these struck me as the main problems.

* How was I going to divide them up into groups of 3 when there were 28 people involved? That left 1 over - what was I supposed to do with the spare?

* How was I going to split up groups of people who had worked happily together for years and now put them in with others who they might not even know or like?

* How was I going to inform my workteam and their representatives of the new arrangements?

As I said, it was going to be some weekend.

I put it off for as long as I could and on Sunday morning, after my family had gone off to the in-laws for the day, I sat down and thought how I might deal with the problem and make a decision. I came up with three possibilities:

* I COULD DO NOTHING

  I know that in a lot of cases I can get away with this. Examples are where I have met my targets for output or quality or costs. If I meet the standards that have been set for me and my workteam, I have nothing to worry about. Again in cases which involve standards I know have been complied with, such as filling in the various pieces of paperwork correctly, I can let them go through as a matter of routine.

  But the task that my manager had set me did not involve a standard or a fixed routine. He had given me a problem to solve and I could only solve it by meeting the deadlines given to me.

  That manager had given to me the AUTHORITY to take a decision affecting my workteam and expected results.

  There was no way that I could, in fact, do nothing. I had to be in a position by next week to take a decision and let everyone involved know the details of my proposal.

  This shows some of the main features of a supervisor's job:

  WHERE A STANDARD OR ROUTINE IS BEING SET AND THE LEADER AND WORKTEAM ARE MEETING THAT STANDARD OR ROUTINE, ONE DECISION A TEAM LEADER CAN TAKE IS TO DO NOTHING.

* I COULD ASK SOMEONE ELSE TO MAKE THE DECISION

  In a lot of cases I know that I do not have the AUTHORITY or RESPONSIBILITY actually to take a decision.

ACTIVITY 2
Time guide
2 mins

Let us consider some of the cases in which you do not have the power to take decisions.

Jot down three examples that spring immediately to mind.

* _____
* _____
* _____

Some typical examples are:

* Changing output levels without permission

* Taking on duties which are the job of someone else

* Dismissing a member of your workteam

* Changing the payment system

* Exceeding costs without good reason

* Recruiting additional members to the workteam

These examples illustrate the point that, in your job as supervisor, you have been given a range of duties to carry out and have been given RESPONSIBILITY to see that they are performed correctly. Additionally you have been given AUTHORITY by management to ensure that the members of your workteam carry out the tasks in their jobs.

You cannot take decisions which you do not have the power to take, but you must take decisions which are part of your duties or which have been delegated to you by management.

In the case of our revised work rota, the decision is quite clear:

YOU CANNOT REFER THE DECISION TO SOMEONE ELSE BECAUSE YOUR MANAGER HAS QUITE CLEARLY STATED THAT IT IS A TASK YOU MUST CARRY OUT.

This does not, however, prevent you asking the advice of others and we will cover this feature of taking decisions in Part B.

* TAKE A DECISION

Because of the fact that I now know that I must take a decision on the revised work rota and manning arrangements by next week I now know that I must make a start in order to meet my deadline. This is more easily said than done, so I had better say goodbye to Sunday as my time for lazing around.

I need to make a start on looking at all of the factors involved and take my decision by Wednesday. To do this I need to have all the details sorted out so I can answer possible questions from my manager, members of my workteam and the unions.

The succeeding parts of this unit will deal with the various factors involved in taking your decision.

SELF CHECK 1
Time guide
3 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

a There are _____ choices involved in taking a decision.

b Where I have met a target, I can take a decision to _____ _____.

c I should not take decisions where I do not have the _____ to do so.

d I need to take decisions where the _____ involved in my job state that I need to take them.

e In taking a decision, I need to take into account all of the _____ involved.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) We discussed three possible choices which we have when involved in taking a decision. b) Where targets have been met, a reasonable decision can be to do nothing. c) You can't take decisions where you don't have the authority to do so. You might also have used a word like 'power' or 'right'. d) Decision-making goes with any management job: you need to take decisions where the duties which make up the job state that you need to. e) You need to take all the factors or features of the problem into account when you take a decision.

3 Summary

REFERENCE 1
Page 57

The supervisor is a decision maker. Three decisions we can take are:

* to do nothing
* to refer the task to someone else
* to take a decision which will deal with the task

Which one we chose will depend upon:

* the authority or power we have to take that decision
* how far the task varies from the standards or routine involved in our job

PART B INFORMATION FOR TAKING DECISIONS

1 Introduction

In this part of the unit we will look at the various types of information available to you which will affect the decisions you will take. In particular we will examine information available from:

* the workplace
* the workteam
* the world outside work

2 The Workplace

Well, here I am in my office and it's Monday morning. I don't have much time left, but when I was sitting and thinking on Sunday, I decided that there were some points on which the firm could provide help. Let's face it, my manager and the organisation had asked me to take the decision on the new manning arrangements for my workteam, so, it was only fair that they provided me with some assistance.

ACTIVITY 3
Time guide
2 mins

Suppose you have to make an important decision affecting your workteam - perhaps one like my problem.

Jot down three types of information you would want your firm to provide to help you made a good decision.

* _____
* _____
* _____

Probably what you have said reflects your own experience at work, but these are the types of information I thought of:

* information about how far I can go in making the decision - in other words, the terms of reference
* the targets which the workteam and I are supposed to be working to

* the right way of doing things - the firm's procedure (if there is one) for the situation I am coping with

* information about industrial relations

* information about previous experience of the same problem.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

2.1 Terms of reference

These would tell me how far I could go in taking the decision. There were really only two ways to check this:

Look at my job duties and responsibilities (this should be on a Job Description but often isn't - you may in fact not have one) and see if it was one of my tasks to take decisions on manning levels and rotas. If it was part of my duties to deal with this matter, then it was quite straightforward - I had to take the decision.

Check out my terms of reference with my manager to make perfectly clear to me the exact extent to which I could take the decision. I could do this only by talking over the task with the manager and reaching agreement on the exact wording on the task I had been given. Once I was sure of this I could begin to look at how to deal with the problem and eventually take a decision.

ACTIVITY 4
Time guide
2 mins

Complete the following statements with a suitable word.

We can say, therefore, that if you are required to take decisions you need to:

a) Define the _____ _____ _____ by looking at your job duties and responsibilities.

b) Clarify the details with _____ _____.

c) Go ahead on the basis of a clear _____ of the task.

d) Go ahead when you are sure the firm has given you the _____ to take the decision.

I would have completed those statements with the following words. a) terms of reference; b) your manager; c) understanding; d) authority.

Other words with similar meanings are equally suitable.

2.2 Targets

The next set of information which I required was the standard of output and quality required of me and my workteam. I needed this to match them against the previous standard so I could get a measure of how much they had changed.

We can say that you require target information because:

THIS SETS THE STANDARD OF OUTPUT AND QUALITY FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR WORKTEAM.

ACTIVITY 5
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down how a clear idea of the standards of output and quality required would help me in my re-organisation of manning.

* _____

_____

_____

It would enable me to match the targets required with the capabilities of people in the workteam. If I know what's required, I can make sure that I get the right mix of people doing the right jobs.

The final benefit of targets is that it gives you something to focus your thinking on. Your experience and observations may tell you whether the targets are realistic given the time, people, equipment which you have. If they are not, you will be able to advise management about the extent of the changes needed to achieve them.

Anyway, you and your workteam have to work to these targets. You should therefore be clear and up-to-date on those which apply.

ACTIVITY 6
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two sources of information about targets for your workteam.

* _____

* _____

_____

Once again, the sources you have thought of will depend on your job but these are typical sources:

* Your manager

* Budgets or targets set by other departments (e.g finance department for costs, personnel for number employed)

* Progress meetings between sections or departments at which targets are agreed.

Your main channel of information will be your manager, so make sure you get enough information from that manager to be in a position to know the precise standards of output and quality you and your workteam are required to achieve.

2.3 Procedures

The next set of information that would seem to be useful are any procedures that would help me to come to a decision.

Procedures are rules for dealing with particular tasks. They lay down the steps that should be followed, who you can refer to for assistance, what additional information is available and sometimes time limits for doing particular things. In short, they provide a standard method that can help in dealing with the task in hand.

You should therefore:

COLLECT, READ AND UNDERSTAND THOSE PROCEDURES THAT MIGHT HELP YOU IN DEALING WITH YOUR TASK.

APPLY THOSE PROCEDURES IN APPROPRIATE CASES.

2.4 Industrial Relations

ACTIVITY 7
Time guide
2 mins

I had been asked to carry out a task which I know had been agreed to by union representatives.

Jot down what information I would need to make sure that the decision I made about manning was in accordance with the agreement reached with the unions.

*

I would need to find out the terms of the agreement to see if it contained any information on revised manning arrangements. The least I needed was a copy of that part of the agreement that involved me and my workteam. More than that, I needed advice from the management who had reached that agreement and from my own manager on what the agreement meant (I'm not an expert in industrial relations, nor do I know if the words reflect what the unions and management meant).

In industrial relations matters you need to:

Have available the agreements or parts of agreements which affect you and your work team.

Have advice from the industrial relations professionals and your own manager about what is actually meant in that agreement

Apply those industrial relations agreements which affect you and your work team.

Now, I have used the example as if a knowledge of industrial relations only mattered if unions are involved. However, both you and I know that even if there are no unions involved, the firm must still have some rules for industrial relations matters. You should make yourself aware of those rules whether there are unions involved in the matter in hand, or not.

2.5 Past Records and Experiences

Now, I can't be alone in being the only person ever to have to make revised manning arrangements. Surely, someone, somewhere else in the workplace must have taken a similar decision in the past. The difficulty is where could I find the details?

ACTIVITY 8
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two suggestions for people or departments you would turn to for information about past records or experience of this sort of problem.

* _____

* _____

Such information can be difficult to find and collect, but a few sources might be:

* Other team leaders who have had similar tasks and experiences in the past. What they did and what the results were could prove invaluable in helping you.

* Your own manager's past experience. I know that you have been given the task to carry out, but the manager wants you to succeed. Ask for advice.

* Departments which contain records or similar events. Examples include personnel, planning and industrial relations departments.

Such information may not give you the exact answer you are looking for, but it can provide guidance on what to do and, perhaps more importantly, what not to do in dealing with the decision you need to take.

SELF CHECK 2
Time guide
3 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

1 I can check my terms of reference by looking at my _____ _____ and by discussing the details of the task with my _____.

2 Targets set the standard of _____ and _____ required of me and my workteam.

3 Procedures are the firm's _____ for dealing with particular tasks.

4 I should be aware of the industrial relations agreements or rules which affect my _____ and myself as a supervisor.

5 Past records and experience can provide _____ in approaching tasks and taking decisions.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) You can check your terms of reference by looking at your job description, if you have one, and by discussing the details of the task with your manager. b) You could have used words such as 'output', 'quantity', 'performance' and 'quality' to complete this statement. c) Procedures are methods fordealing with particular tasks. They tell you, step-by-step, what youshould do. d) You need to know about any industrial relations agreements which affect your workteam and yourself. e) Although past experience may not be exactly the same as the problem you are dealing with, past records and experience can give you guidance or advice on the approach you need to take.

3 The Workteam

We have looked at the information the workplace can provide in helping us to take decisions. It is time we looked at the information available to us closer to home. This, of course, is the information available within the workteam itself.

Remember, the task I have as a supervisor is still how to take a decision on revised manning arrangements.

ACTIVITY 9
Time guide
2 mins

Think of the ways in which you could gather information about your workteam in a way that would help you to take decisions affecting yourself and them. Note down two ways of getting such information which come immediately to mind.

* _____

* _____

I have come up with four methods of gathering information about my workteam, but perhaps you can think of more.

My four suggestions are:

Past records

Present performance

Personal observation

Consultation - by talking to them!

Let's look at each of those in detail - I'm deliberately leaving the one I consider most important until last.

* Past Records

One way of finding out about the behaviour of members of your workteam is through past records about them. These records might be held in a variety of places but the ones most accessible to you as supervisor will be in the Personnel Department and in the records you and your predecessors have built up. They should contain information relating to past performance, experience and training, discipline and personal background details which would be useful to you in making decisions about them.

ACTIVITY 10
Time guide
2 mins

Why do you think the information those records contain might be useful to you when you are making decisions about your workteam?

Jot down two reasons.

* _____

* _____

There are all sorts of reasons but I would single out these three.

* Information relating to past behaviour can be a guide to how an individual might react to new events

* By knowing about each member of your workteam, you can build up a pattern about how and why they work together as a team

* You can become aware of the strengths and weaknesses available within your work team

By being aware of these details you will be to some extent trying to measure how the team members will react to your decisions.

* Present Performance

This is one item of information of which you must be aware or else you're not doing your job. Details of present performance of each member of your workteam and of the team as a whole is the main standard by which you can measure whether or not you are carrying out your job as supervisor effectively. It means, in effect, whether you know if the members of the workteam are doing their jobs to meet the required targets.

ACTIVITY 11
Time guide
2 mins

Complete the following statement with two suitable words.

Targets are described in terms of the _____ and the _____

of the work your workteam should produce.

I hope we can agree that 'quantity' and 'quality' are what targets are about. So you will be asking yourself:

> Are individuals and the workteam in total meeting the required quantities of work? - Quantity Target
>
> Are individuals and the workteam in total meeting the required quality of work? - Quality Target

By identifying shortcomings and/or quality target strengths in individuals and the workteam you will be in a position to judge how decisions you might take will affect them. You can also use it and team effectiveness by, for example, giving additional training where required, offering praise and encouragement where appropriate, offering incentive and opportunity.

So, we can say that, by being aware of current standards of performance, you can find what needs putting right in your workteam and as a consequence increase the effectiveness of the decisions you take.

* Personal Observation

This one can be a bit tricky, because it depends upon you keeping your eyes open and knowing what is going on within the workteam. The main drawback is that, even though you might know all the things you should know as team leader, there may be things happening within the workteam which will be concealed from you.

ACTIVITY 12
Time guide
2 mins

From your experience give two examples of the kind of thing which workteams tend to keep quiet about and not let the supervisor know.

* _____

* _____

We could probably think up a vast number of examples between us but I think the things workteams tend to keep quiet about tend to fall into two categories:

bad relationships

unofficial standards agreed amongst themselves which might conflict with yours.

An example of the latter would be something like "Let Fred leave early on Thurdsay because he has to pick up the kids from school. We'll cover for him - no need to let the boss know. He'll be at the section leaders' meeting anyway."

You may have a feeling that such things are going on, but it is often quite difficult to pin them down exactly.

Nevertheless, a good supervisor should try to identify with the team and its members by building good personal relationships in such a manner that he is aware of what is currently happening.

By having good relationships and by observation the supervisor will be in a position to take decisions in a way that will create as little tension as possible within the team.

* Consultation

As I said, I left the most important point about the workteam as my final point. I have always found that if I want to know how people might react to the decisions I take it is always best to ask them what they think about the subject before I actually take the decision. In other words, before I reach the decision I do two things which make up what we call consultation.

ACTIVITY 13
Time guide
2 mins

Consultation involves two equal activities on your past. Jot down what you think they are.

* _____

* _____

Proper consultation depends on:

TALKING
LISTENING

Before you reach a decision you need to talk to the workteam about the problems and give them as much information as you can as clearly as you can.

Then you ask for their comments. What they say will reflect relationships within the workteam, their experience and their feelings about various courses of action. It's up to you to listen to what's actually said and to what is said 'between the lines'.

By consulting the workteam it is possible to judge the reactions of the members to decisions you might make. By knowing at least some of those reactions in advance, you can make and put into action decisions with at least some knowledge of the consequences on the team.

SELF CHECK 3
Time guide
3 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

a I can find out some information relating to workteam members' experience and training from _____ records.

b I can identify strengths and weaknesses in workteam members by comparing _____ performance with targets.

c I can discover information on personal relationships within the workteam by personal _____.

d The first step in consulting with the workteam is to _____ information.

e The second step in consulting with the workteams is to _____ to the members' comments on the subject.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) I would complete this statement with 'past' or 'present'. You may also have thought that 'personnel' would be equally suitable. b) You identify strengths and weaknesses by comparing present or recent performance with targets. c) There's no substitute for carefully watching and noticing what's going on around you. 'Observation' would suitably complete this statement. d) The first step in consultation is to share the information you have. 'Give' or 'provide' would do equally well. e) The second, equally important stage is to listen to the workteam's comments.

4 The World Outside Work

Under this heading we are looking at those factors outside the workplace which cannot always be controlled or predicted but which must be taken into account when we are taking decisions.

The extent to which these factors will affect an individual supervisor vary according to the job carried out and level held in each organisation.

Having said that the effects will vary from job to job however, I feel that each supervisor should be in possession of information from outside the firm which will aid in taking decisions.

ACTIVITY 14
Time guide
2 mins

Think of the ways in which the world outside your workplace affects the decisions you might take on behalf of your workteam. Note down two types of information which have such an effect.

* _____

_____

* _____

_____

You may have thought of several things including

* the law,

* competitors' methods,

* the state of the economy and so on.

It is important for supervisors to know and, more importantly, to have up-to-date information on all of them. Such information can help you to take better decisions.

Let's look at each of my suggestions in more detail.

Legal Requirements

The law has had an increasing effect upon workplaces and people at work over the last twenty years.

ACTIVITY 15
Time guide
3 mins

Jot down two ways which you know of in which what you can do at work has been affected by the law.

* _____

* _____

Here is a summary of some of the main areas which have been affected by legislation.

Health and Safety standards Information on changed work methods Rights of Safety Reps to raise problems	Health and Safety at Work Act
Hours of work Safety standards Cleanliness First aid facilities	Factories and Offices Shop and Railway Premises Act
Disciplinary Procedures Grievance Procedures Redundancy rights Right to alternative employment Dismissal rights	Employment Protection Acts

This list is by no means complete, but it does give an indication of the range of legal requirements and the effect upon work. Now, I am not saying that every team leader needs to be a legal specialist, but I am saying that team leaders need to be aware of their existence and have some place to go where they can get information and advice.

ACTIVITY 16
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down the person or department at work to which you would go for advice and information about the law.

* _____

What you have said is likely to reflect the sort of workplace you work in. In large companies, getting such information and advice may be a straightforward affair, in that you can often go to a specialist department or person (e.g. safety officer, personnel department, industrial relations department and so on) equipped to give that information. Often there may also be written procedures and policies to which the team leader can refer.

In smaller companies which do not always have specialists, however, the problem can be one where you need to go outside the workplace in order to get the information you need. Such advice is available usually from local or central government departments (e.g. Health and Safety Executive, Department of Employment, local authority Environmental Health Officers etc) either in the form of written guidelines or in providing a specialist whom you can talk to.

ACTIVITY 17
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two reasons why it's important that you know about legal requirements which affect your workteam.

* _____

_____

* _____

_____

---

* You probably said, rightly, that it's important to know what the legal requirements are so that you don't plan to do anything outside the law.

* A knowledge of legal requirements also means that you will take decisions which follow up-to-date standards and best current practice (in matters of health and safety, for instance).

* Perhaps most importantly, if you know the legal requirements or you know where to go for information and guidance, then the decisions you make are likely to be well-informed choices, not guesses.

Competitors and Other Organisations

This is usually a much more difficult subject to get information about, because other companies and especially competitors are not usually in the habit of publishing the reasons why they are successful. Such information, however, does exist in some form.

ACTIVITY 18
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two ways in which you could find out about successful business methods which your competitors may be using.

* _____

* _____

_____

It's a question of keeping your ears and eyes continually open.

I suggest these ways, but my list is by no means complete.

* Television documentaries about successful and unsuccessful companies

* Press coverage of industrial relations methods and new technologies

* in-depth articles in specialist journals

It is not possible for a supervisor to know of all these developments but it is possible to become generally aware of the changes taking place in the work being done in other companies by which they hope to become more successful.

I have already mentioned some of the types of information which have been published recently. A checklist which a team leader should try to bear in mind might therefore include information on new developments in:

Product design

Processes and equipment

Information technology

Communications methods

Industrial relations

Work organisation

Quality control

By being generally aware of the developments taking place in other companies you are more likely to make well-informed decisions in your own.

Remember, we want to know what is happening in othr companies so that we can apply successful developments where possible and discard unsuccessful developments. We use such information as a guide in taking decisions within our own workplace.

The Labour Market

This area is a very general one and you cannot usually know everything that is going on in the market for the product or service offered by your company. The state of the economy is usually an even more complicated affair in that very few, if any, people seem to understand it. So let us try to be a little more realistic and determine how a general knowledge of these things might help us to take better decisions.

In the final analysis, when you attempt to use such information, it usually boils down to considering the people already in the workteam and those who might be needed in the future. The types of information involved might be:

- Wage levels to attract the right staff
- The current skill levels of work team members
- The skill levels of potential recruits
- Training required for present staff and potential recruits

I am really saying that you need to have a feeling for whether the quality of the present workteam membership is right and, if not, what quality you require for the future. You will not usually make the decisions on this, but by having a general knowledge of what is going on in industry as a whole you will be able to make a valuable contribution to the decision.

This part of the unit, about the types of information we might need in order to make a decision, has been fairly involved.

You might find the following checklist helpful to clarify your thinking.

I am not saying that you will need to go through this list for every decision that you take because, as we have already seen in part A, many decisions can be taken as a matter of routine. But, when we come to making decisions which are not routine and require information on a larger scale, it can provide a useful basis on which to gather information before taking our decisions.

CHECKLIST: INFORMATION FOR TAKING DECISIONS

Source of Information	Type of Information	For this Decision		
		Is it Required? / or x	Is it Available To me? / or x	Do I Understand It? / or x
1 The Workplace	My terms of reference	/		
	Targets	/		
	Procedures	/		
	Industrial relations	/		
	Past records & experiences	/		
2 The Workteam	Past records	/		
	Present performance	/		
	Personal observation	/		
	Consultation	/		
3 The World Outside work	Legal requirements	/		
	Other organisations	/		
	The labour market	/		

SELF CHECK 4
Time guide
3 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or group of words.

a) By having information and taking advice on legal requirements, the supervisor can take decisions which do not _____ the law.

b) In a large firm, the supervisor can go to a specialist for advice. Other supervisors may need to go to _____ _____ for such advice.

c) By looking at new _____ in other companies, we can often use this information as a basis for taking decisions in our own workplace.

d) By knowing the _____ of potential recruits, the supervisor can decide if they will meet the standards required in the workteam.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) Information and advice on legal requirements can help to ensure that you make decisions which do not break the law. b) If your firm can't provide the specialist help you need, you may have to go to a government department for it. c) Keeping an eye on new developments in other firms means that you may make better-informed decisions in your own workplace. d) A word like 'quality' or 'standard' would suitably complete this statement.

5 Summary

Information can be obtained from three sources

- the workplace
- the workteam
- the world outside work

Information in the workplace includes:

- terms of reference
- targets
- existing procedures
- industrial relations
- past records and experience

Information about the workteam can be obtained:

- from past records (personnel records)
- from present performance
- by observation
- through consultation

Information from the world outside work can be obtained:

- by consulting specialists at work or specialist government departments
- by reading books, journals, newspapers and watching television documentaries.

PART C RISKS INVOLVED IN TAKING DECISIONS

1 Introduction

EXTENSION 2
Page 55

In this part of the unit we will examine three elements of risk arising from decisions we take:

* costs
* quality
* quantity or output

Under each of these headings we will try to identify:

* the worst possible consequences
* the best possible consequences
* likely consequences and outcomes

2 Cost

EXTENSION 3
Page 55

We have already seen in Part B that one set of information you will require from the workplace will be targets required of you and your workteam. These targets are usually expressed in the form of costs (we will consider quality and output later in this section). In many cases, the decision that a supervisor takes will influence whether or not the workteam meets the required target and therefore affect the costs of carrying out the task.

ACTIVITY 19
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two examples of decisions you might make which would affect costs in your work area.

* _____
* _____

Exactly how many and what sort of decisions you can make which affect costs will vary from one job to another. However, some typical examples are:

* the number of people you use on a certain job
* the amount of overtime you work
* the quantity of material you use.

When taking decisions, you should always attempt to define the effects your decisions will have upon these costs. This definition should take account of

BEST, WORST AND LIKELY OUTCOMES

Let us try to think of a practical example:

Suppose you are in charge of a workteam of 10 people in a large accounts department, sending out 10,000 bills a week to customers. Because of recent advertising the number of accounts has increased and you will now need to send out 12,000 bills a week.

Your staff earn an average of £100 per week.

ACTIVITY 20
Time guide
1 min

How much does it cost you to send out each bill?

* _____

Total wages in your workteam amount to 10 x £100 = £1000. Since you send 10,000 bills a week, each bill costs you $\frac{£1,000}{10,000}$ = 10p

You know that the workteam is at full stretch now and can't do any more. It appears that your choices in the sort-term are

either to get additional staff

or to pay the existing staff to work overtime.

ACTIVITY 21
Time guide
1 min

If you were to take on additional staff, what do you think is the minimum you would need?

Tick whichever seems to you correct.

1	
2	
5	

If 10 staff can send out 10,000 bills a week, we can assume that they can each manage 1,000 bills a week. Since you currently need to send out 12,000 bills a week you would need 12 staff - 2 more than you have at present.

However, because of the fact that they will need training in your procedures and use the time of your existing staff in asking questions you know that three additional staff would be more sensible. On the question of overtime you are aware that payment is at time and a half and that this will mean an increase of 25% or £25 per week on existing wages. You know, in any case, that the staff don't like working overtime on a regular basis.

Let us look at the alternatives:

Three additional staff

Wages: 13 people x £100 per week

£1300 per week

Cost per bill: £1300 per week divided by 12,000 bills

10.83p per week

Overtime Working

Wages: 10 people x £125 per week

£1250 per week

Cost per bill: £1250 per week divided by 1200 bills

10.42p per week

No additional staff or overtime working

10,000 bills sent out at 10p per bill but 2000 remain unpaid each week.

Let's look at the possible outcomes.

ACTIVITY 22
Time guide
2 mins

Using the information you have already, jot down which you think is the most likely outcome.

* _____

_____

We can present the possible outcomes like this:

I chose additional staff as the likely outcome because we already know that members of the workteam would probably be unwilling to work overtime on a regular basis. Although getting them to work overtime is the best possible outcome in terms of cost, as things are, taking on additional staff looks more likely.

In this case doing nothing would clearly be the worst possible outcome and quite unacceptable.

Best possible outcome:	Work overtime - 12,000 bills sent out each week at 10.42p each.
Likely outcome:	Additional staff - 12,000 bills sent out each week at 10.83p each.
Worst outcome:	No change - 10,000 bills sent out each week at 10p each but 2000 bills not sent out.

So let us make a few points arising from this situation.

WE NEED TO IDENTIFY THE COSTS INVOLVED IN THE DECISIONS WE TAKE

and

WE SHOULD ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE ALTERNATIVE OUTCOMES OR CONSEQUENCES ARISING FROM THE CHOICE OF DECISION OPEN TO US.

3 Quality

We've looked at targets defined in terms of cost but they may also be defined in terms of quality. This is basically how acceptable the output of the workteam is to the firm (and, probably more importantly, to the customer).

In this instance, you are attempting to define the effect decisions you take will have upon the quality of work and therefore the output of the workteam. As with costs, we should attempt to define the consequences of decisions taken in terms of best, likely and worst outcomes.

If we think of our Accounts Department sending out bills to customers we can list the alternative choices in the following way:

ACTIVITY 23
Time guide
2 mins

Decide whether each of the choices is acceptable or unacceptable in terms of quality of output.

Additional staff:	quality of total bills 12,000 remains acceptable/unacceptable.
Overtime working:	quality of total bills 12,000 remains acceptable/unacceptable
No additional staff or overtime working:	10,000 bills acceptable but 2000 not dealt with acceptable/unacceptable

I hope we can agree that issuing 12,000 bills a week, either by taking on additional staff or by working overtime, would be acceptable - the quality of the work achieved by the section would be up to the target set.

Only to issue 10,000 and to leave 2,000 not dealt with would be unacceptable.

We can therefore list the outcomes as

Best possible outcome:	either additional staff, or overtime working
Likely outcome:	additional staff (because present staff would not work regular overtime)
Worst outcome:	no change, therefore 2,000 bills not sent out.

We can see from this analysis that costs and quality have a direct impact upon one another that can help us in reaching a particular choice of decision.

Therefore we can note two main points:

WE NEED TO IDENTIFY THE EFFECTS UPON QUALITY WHEN TAKING DECISIONS

and

WE SHOULD DEFINE ALTERNATIVE OUTCOMES UPON QUALITY ARISING FROM ALTERNATIVE DECISIONS

4 Quantity or Output

An additional target that you as workteam leader are normally expected to meet is that of quantity or output. This can be measured as:

- physical units in a production operation
- standard hours where a work measurements system is in operation
- or routine times for administrative or paperwork systems.

Your major concern as supervisor is in making sure that the targets are realistic and in taking decisions in such a way that those output targets are achieved.

In the case of our Accounts Department the alternative decisions are:

1) Additional staff:	output target of 12,000 bills per week achieved
2) Overtime working:	output target of 12,000 bills per week achieved
3) No additional staff or overtime working:	output target not achieved 10,000 bills only per week sent out.

If we list these in terms of outcomes we get:

Best possible outcome:	either additional staff, or overtime working.
Likely outcome:	additional staff (because present staff would not work regular overtime)
Worst outcome:	no change - the output target would not be achieved.

We can therefore see from this analysis that the three headings we listed in the introduction - cost, quality and output have a direct effect upon each other that can help us to reach a particular choice of decision.

Therefore we can note two main points under this heading:

YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY THE EFFECTS UPON QUANTITY OR OUTPUT WHEN TAKING DECISIONS

and

YOU SHOULD DEFINE ALTENATIVE OUTCOMES UPON OUTPUT WHEN TAKING DECISIONS.

SELF CHECK 5
Time guide
3 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

a I need to define the effects upon cost, _____ and _____ arising from the possible decisions I take as supervisor.

b By assessing the likely effects of my decisions I can minimise the degree of _____ involved.

c There are 3 outcomes to most decisions. Best, _____ and likely.

d Cost, _____ and _____ have an _____ upon one another which can lead me to the most likely choice of decision.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) You need to define the effects upon cost, quality and output or quantity arising from the possible decisions you take. b) In so doing, you can make a decision which minimises the degree of risk involved. c) Most decisions have three possible outcomes: best, worst and likely. a) Cost, quality and output have an impact or effect on each other which can lead you to the most likely choice of decision.

5 Summary

To make a decision you must know the risks.

Think about the possible effects of choices in terms of:

cost
quality
quantity or output

Then identify:

the best
the most likely
the worst

outcome for each of the choices you are considering.

By choosing the best or most likely outcome you can minimise the risk involved in your decision.

PART D SIX STAGES IN PROBLEM SOLVING

1 Introduction

As we've said before, many decisions are fairly easy to make. Perhaps they are fairly routine: although a decision still has to be made, the likely consequences are known or predictable and it's not difficult to make a choice, provided we have sufficient information.

However, frequently there is a change in routine - something happens which creates a whole new situation. We still have to make a decision but this time it is part of a rather more complex problem-solving exercise.

In this part of the unit we'll look at a process which will help us to work methodically towards solving a problem and making the best decisions for the circumstances we're dealing with.

There are six stages to this problem-solving process:

EXTENSION 4
Page 55

* defining what we're trying to do
* gathering facts
* identifying the cause of the problem
* defining solutions
* selecting and putting in action the most practical solution
* follow-up and evaluation

2 Defining what we're trying to do

Defining precisely what we're trying to achieve is called defining objectives. Until you've done that you will just flounder around a problem and may make a decision which does nothing to solve the real problem. If I can use an example; dealing with a disciplinary offence can have a number of objectives. These might range from

- punishing an individual for misconduct
- using individual punishment as an example to the rest of the workteam
- applying disciplinary rules because that is part of your duties and so on.

I suggest that the real objective of dealing with a disciplinary offence isn't any of these and, indeed, if you make any of these your objective you may end up with another problem in addition to the one you started with.

ACTIVITY 24
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down what you think are the real objectives in dealing with a disciplinary offence.

* _____

* _____

* _____

I think that in this instance the real objectives in dealing with the disciplinary offence are; to ascertain the reasons why an individual is behaving in a particular way and to ensure that the individual does not behave in that way in the future.

Therefore we can say that we need to be very careful in defining an objective. It must be:

A CLEAR STATEMENT OF WHAT YOU WISH TO ACHIEVE
IN ORDER TO SOLVE THAT PARTICULAR PROBLEM.

3 Gathering Facts and Assumptions

In Part B we have already dealt with the range of information that a supervisor may require in order to take practical decisions. Remember this information came from:

the workplace
the workteam
the world outside work

In addition to requiring this information, we may also have to take into account the opinions, assumptions and prejudices of other people involved in the decision. (Don't forget that the supervisor also has opinions, assumptions and prejudices - they might not be correct!) When we are attempting to solve a poblem we must separate the facts from the opinions, assumptions and prejudices and then go on to see which are borne out by the facts and which are not. We will not always be able to get all the facts required to solve a problem but we should try to reduce the effects of these opinions, assumptions and prejudices to a minimum. Here's an example of a prejudiced statement sounding like a statement of fact.

Ford President Europe 1985 - "British workers produce less than half the cars produced by workers in German Ford factories".

ACTIVITY 25
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down the assumption that is being made about German workers or British workers in this statement.

It assumes that Germans work twice as hard as British workers.

But there could be all sorts of complicating factors which we ought to know about before we could make such an assumption. We need a lot more information about precisely what happens in both countries.

The same is true solving any problem: don't accept assumptions until you've satisfied yourself that you've got all the information you need to back them up.

Thus, GATHER ENOUGH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN IN ORDER TO TAKE DECISIONS BASED UPON FACT

and TAKE INTO ACCOUNT REASONABLE OPINIONS, ASSUMPTIONS AND PREJUDICES WHICH ARE BORNE OUT BY THE FACTS OF THE PARTICULAR CASE

but, DISCARD UNREASONABLE OPINIONS, ASSUMPTIONS AND PREJUDICES WHICH ARE NOT BORNE OUT BY THE FACTS OF THE PARTICULAR CASE.

4 Identifying the Cause of a Problem

This step follows naturally from the previous one. When you have enough information you can now begin to decide the cause of a problem. This is not always as easy as it seems because we usually get the causes of a problem mixed up with the results or consequences.

For instance if we use our example of dealing with a disciplinary offence, the result might be that the individual being disciplined is persistently late for work.

ACTIVITY 26
Time guide
1 min

Jot down three reasons why somebody might be persistently late for work.

*
*
*

There are probably dozens of reasons which might make anybody late for work. It may simply be not getting up and getting organised, in which case discipline is probably in order. Equally though it could be a problem with transport or problems at home which make it very difficult to get to work on time.

In that case, adding up the number of times the person is late (looking at the results or consquences) is fairly futile.

Finding out the cause of the problem is more likely to result in finding a genuine solution to the problem.

This example holds true across a whole range of problems at work:

* Breakdowns may not be because of age or bad design but because of lack of maintenance.

* Low quality might not be because of bad workmanship but be caused by using the wrong materials.

I could go on like this forever, but the important point to make is that:

YOU SHOULD IDENTIFY THE CAUSE OF A PROBLEM AS PRECISELY AS POSSIBLE

and

YOU SHOULD USE THE RESULTS OR CONSEQUENCES OF A PROBLEM AS GUIDANCE IN IDENTIFYING THE CAUSE.

5 Developing Solutions

EXTENSION 5
Page 56

Some problems have only one solution, especially where the cause of a problem is technical. Other problems, especially those involving human beings, can have several different solutions. Under this heading we are considering situations where you have defined your objectives, gathered your information and decided the cause of a problem. You will now be in a position to begin to search for a solution.

REFERENCE 2
Page 57

REFERENCES
1 and 2
Page 57

The main point to make is that you should not assume that there is always only one solution. Try a little imagination or creativity - think of as many possible solutions as you can, no matter how ridiculous they might seem. You will probably find in the end that you can't carry out some of them but, at least you will have given yourself a choice.

Let's have a look at a possible method for developing alternative solutions. Exactly what you do will depend on the particular problem you're dealing with but I think you'll find these four general guidelines helpful.

* SUSPEND JUDGEMENT

  Keep an open mind

  Don't dismiss any idea out-of hand because it seems far-fetched or not immediately acceptable. Most good ideas were regarded as silly ideas once - submarines, space flight, the plimsoll loading line on ships are just a few examples. Perhaps the idea which seems laughable at first will have some important points in its favour when you think about it closely later on.

* FREEWHEEL

  Let your imagination work freely.

  The more way out the ideas you generate, the better might be the results. You could come up with novel solutions to your problems where the conventional solutions haven't really worked in the past.

* KEEP A RECORD

  List as many alternative solutions as you possibly can. The more choices you have available the greater the chance of hitting on a solution which can solve your problem. If you don't jot them down as they come to you, it's all too easy to forget one or two later when you come to weigh up all the possibilities.

* CROSS FERTILISE

  If it's at all possible, talk it over with other people at work. Listen to any ideas they have for solving the problem. Perhaps they have tackled a similar problem before and you could adapt their solution to the circumstances you are in.

Let's see how these guidelines would work out in an actual example.

Suppose you supervise a workteam of twenty people. Most of them are quite competent but two of them strike you as being very lazy. The problem is what to do about them.

The first of our four guidelines is SUSPEND JUDGEMENT. Any solution <u>may</u> be suitable if it will solve the problem. Keep an open mind.

The next of our guidelines is FREEWHEEL.

As long as the solution is legal, any way of dealing with the problem may be suitable. (Sometimes you may even feel it's a pity you have to stick to solutions which <u>are</u> legal!)

ACTIVITY 27
Time guide
5 mins

Let your imagination run wild!

Jot down as many suggestions as you can for possible ways of dealing with the problem of two bone idle workteam members. (Remember - suspend judgement. Write down anything which comes to mind.)

Obviously I have no way of telling what you've written. Probably between us we could come up with some very novel ideas! Here are some of my suggestions anyway.

Use the disciplinary procedure on the 2 lazy workers.

Check on every move they make.

Make their life hell by giving them work which will keep them tied up every minute of the day.

Ask them why they are lazy.

Give them additional training.

Have nothing to do with them.

Get the rest of the workteam to put pressure on them.

Complain to the union representative about them.

Get them transferred to another department.

Let your department manager handle the problem.

Reading these, you might think 'You can't do that!' or 'That wouldn't work!' but, remember, SUSPEND JUDGEMENT. Don't dismiss any suggestions without submitting it to some hard and systematic consideration.

By carrying out the last activity, we've really already taken care of our next guideline - KEEP A RECORD. In practice, it's all too easy to chew a problem over, think of plenty of possible solutions, and then promptly forget some or all of them because they weren't jotted down in a list at the time.

Finally CROSS-FERTILISE.

ACTIVITY 28
Time guide
2 mind

Given the problem of two lazy workteam members, how could you cross fertilise ideas in the workplace so that you can come up with some more possible solutions?

* _____

You may have suggested a number of things. I hope they would include discussing the problem with other supervisors.

Have these two workteam members worked for another supervisor in the past? If so, what seemed to be the best way of coping with them then?

Does anyone have experience of dealing with other people who are a similar problem? How have they tackled the problem?

You might be able to use a variation on their solution to help you now.

SELF CHECK 6
Time guide
2 mins

We have suggested four guidelines to help you develop possible solutions to a problem.

Jot down what those four guidelines are.

* _____
* _____
* _____
* _____

I hope we can agree that the four guidelines are suspend judgement, freewheel, keep a record and cross fertilise. Of course, you may well have used different words from me which contain the same ideas. Nor does it matter if you've listed the guidelines in a different order from mine.

I hope you'll find these guidelines useful whenever you're trying to think up possible solutions to a problem.

There are many other techniques you might like to try out depending on the nature of the problem you are dealing with.

EXTENSION 5
page 56

You'll find some more information about generating ideas in another unit in this series - Quality Circles.

6 Selecting and Carrying out a solution

Now that you have a number of solutions to your problem available, you can begin to select the most appropriate. It you took my advice in the stage above you have probably come up with some way out solutions so, we had better draw up a few rules on which solutions to choose.

ACTIVITY 29
Time guide
5 mins

Jot down three guidelines or rules whch you would use to help you decide on a solution to a problem.

eg it must practical and effective

* _____
* _____
* _____

Here are the guidelines I would suggest. You experience may well have convinced you fo the importance of some others too.

* The solution must be practical and effective - it must work. It is no good finding a solutin that does not meet your original objective.

* The solution must be economic. This is not to say that it should be the cheapest, but it should be at a cost which the firm decides it can afford. (We could all find the right solutions if we had unlimited resources - but resources are limited).

* The solution must be in line with company policy and be consistent with established rules, procedures and current practice. This sounds as though I am saying do not do anything out of the ordinary. I'm not but, if you do have anovel solution hich is against company policy you should be prepared to argue it through in order to get the policy changed. That's not an easy task.

* The solution chosen must be within your authority to carry out. In other words, your terms of reference or job description should state that you can carry out this particular solution. if you do not have this authority, you must argue your case with your manager in order to get it.

* The solution must be legal - it must conform to whatever legal requirements and standards apply to you and your workteam.

7 Follow-up and Evaluation

So you've made your decision and carried it out, but this isn't the end of the process.

ACTIVITY 30
Time guide
2 mins

Jot down two things which you ought to check having carried out your decision.

* _____

* _____

I hope we can agree that the two things you should check are:

* whether it has worked - whether your solution has actually achieved your objective in solving this particular problem

* whether your solution has had any other effects which you did or did not predict.

You may need to carry out periodic checks to see if the solution is working satisfactorily. Only you can decide the intervals at which you need to check and the information you require in order to discover if your solution has been a sound one.

If you find out that your solution is not sound, you need to go back to the first stage and define your objective again.

SELF CHECK 7
Time guide
4 mins

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

a In defining our objective we make a clear statement of what we wish to _____ in order to solve a problem.

b Unreasonable assumptions, opinions and _____ should be disregarded.

c A supervisor should define the _____ of a problem as precisely as possible.

d A supervisor should try to develop a number of alternative _____ to a problem.

e The solution chosen must conform to existing organisation policy, _____ and rules.

f A supervisor should _____ to determine if the solution actually works.

The answers to this self check are here in the following words, so you'll need to check out your answers carefully. a) Objectives provide a clear statement of what we hope to achieve in order to solve a problem. b) Everybody has their own prejudices, you included, but you should judge them, together with any other unreasonable assumptions and opinions, in the light of the facts. c) You should define the cause of the problem precisely before you attempt to solve it. d) You should try to develop a number of alternative solutions to a problem rather than settling for the first half-reasonable idea you have. e) The solution chosen must conform to company policy procedures or methods and rules. d) You haven't finished with the problem until you've checked or followed-up to determine whether the solution actually works.

8 Summary

The six stages of problem solving

* defining the objective
* gathering facts
* identifying the cause of a problem
* developing solutions
* selecting and carrying out a solution
* follow-up and evaluation.

If the first solution doesn't work go back to the first stage of the process and start again.

PART E CHECKLISTS FOR MAKING DECISIONS

1 Introduction

In this part of the unit we'll bring together the ideas we've looked at so far in order to develop a method for taking decisions. Of course, not all the decisions you make require as much analysis as we have given in this unit but, by developing an orderly method of making decisions, you'll find that you become more practised and confident in taking decisions, large and small.

We will develop check-lists for

* taking decisions at work
* information for taking decisions
* risks involved in taking decisions
* six stages in problem solving

2 Taking Decisions at Work

This refers to the information we discussed in Part A.

The check-list I would use in this case would be:

CHECKLIST:

DECIDING WHETHER TO TAKE A DECISION

	/ or x	Next Step
1. Can I do nothing?		If / don't go any further If x move to next question
2. Can I refer the decision to someone else?		If / don't go any further If x move to next question
3. Must I take the decision		If x you missed the first and second questions If / move to the next checklist.

Move on to the next checklist.

3 Information for Taking Decisions

This is the checklist we discussed in Part B, but it might be useful to repeat it again here. Remember it's about gathering information:

CHECKLIST: INFORMATION FOR TAKING DECISIONS

Source of Information	Type of Information	For this Decision		
		Is it Required? / or x	Is it Available To me? / or x	Do I Understand It? / or x
1 The Workplace	My terms of reference	/		
	Targets	/		
	Procedures	/		
	Industrial relations	/		
	Past records & experiences	/		
2 The Workteam	Past records	/		
	Present performance	/		
	Personal observation	/		
	Consultation	/		
3 The World Outside work	Legal requirements	/		
	Other organisations	/		
	The labour market	/		

Move on to the next checklist.

4 Risks involved

In Part C we discussed cost, quality and output and the possible consequences or outcomes upon these that taking decisions could bring about.

My checklist here would be:

CHECKLIST: RISKS INVOLVED IN TAKING DECISIONS

Subject	OUTCOME POSSIBLE		
	Best	Worst	Likely
Cost			
Quality			
Quantity or Output			

In this checklist we would fill in the statistics that we had available in order to assist us in reaching decisions, bearing in mind all the other information which might affect our decision.

Remember, any single factor is not enough: cost, quality and output have effects upon one another.

Move on to the next checklist.

5 Six Stages in Problem Solving

CHECKLIST: PROBLEM SOLVING

Stage	Action	Sequence
Define the objective	State what you wish to achieve clearly.	1
Gather facts and assumptions	Gather information. Try not to be influenced by opinions assumptions.	2
Define the cause of a problem	Identify the real cause. Use the results of the problem as guidance.	3
Develop solutions	Generate a number of alternative solutions.	4
Select and implement a solution	Must be practical, economic, conform to company policy, within your authority and be legal.	5
Follow-up and evaluation	Check the results of your solution. If it doesn't work, go back to 1.	6

This checklist on problem solving contains some of the elements contained in other sections we have looked at and, if followed consistently, can improve your effectiveness in analysing and solving problems.

6 Summary

Checklists can provide a methodical approach to decision-making.

Checklists have been developed for:

* deciding the decision
* information for taking decisions
* risks involved in taking decisions
* problem solving

By dealing with decisions in this way we can become

* more effective in taking decisions as team leaders
* increase the effectiveness of our workteams.

PART F PERFORMANCE CHECK

1 End Check

Time guide
60 mins

You may review your understanding of the unit as a whole by completing this group of questions. DON'T GUESS THE ANSWERS - if you're not sure, flick back into the unit and check before responding.

If you are still unsure then put a question mark against your response before proceeding.

TRUE/FALSE

Respond to each statement by writing True or False in the space provided.

1 A supervisor never needs to take decisions. _____

2 A supervisor should always refer any decisions required to someone else. _____

3 Consulting with the workteam is about sharing information and inviting comment. _____

4 A supervisor needs to be aware of developments outside the workplace. _____

5 A supervisor does not need to take into account targets so long as the workteam is happy. _____

6 A team leader should try to calculate the outcomes of decisions in terms of costs, quality and output. _____

7 A team leader does not need to solve problems. These can always be referred to the manager. _____

8 For every problem there is only one ideal solution. _____

9 Once a problem has been solved we can forget about it. We don't need to check that the solution is working. _____

10 By developing a standard method for taking decisions a supervisor can become more effective at work. _____

COMPLETION

Respond by completing each sentence with a suitable word or words.

11 You can usually decide if you have the authority to take a decision by knowing the terms of _____ for the job, or by having them in the job description.

12 A supervisor can get information to help in taking decisions from; the workplace, the _____ and the world outside work.

13 When taking decisions, you should try to calculate the consequences in terms of best, _____ and likely outcomes.

14 There are _____ stages in solving problems.

15 Follow-up and evaluation means _____ whether a solution to a problem is working.

16 Checklists help a supervisor become more _____ in taking decisions.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Respond to each question by putting a mark against the ONE answer which is most correct.

17 A supervisor needs not take a decision if:

a) it is not in the terms of reference for the job

b) he has never made a similar decision before

c) he has not been told to

d) he doesn't know how to

18 When a supervisor consults with the workteam:

a) information should be shared and comment invited

b) no information should not be given to the team

c) some, but not all, information should be given to the team

d) they should be told the decision the team leader has taken and no comments invited

19 A supervisor should try to calculate the effects of decisions upon costs in order to:

a) reach the lowest cost without taking any other factors into consideration

b) get a bigger budget for the workteam

c) decide the effect upon the quality and output of the workteam

d) increase his own salary

20 A supervisor selects a solution to a problem because:

a) it's the first one he thought of

b) it is practical

c) it will never work

d) it's the least complicated

21 A team leader should always take decisions which are:

a) the least expensive

b) the most expensive

c) the easiest

d) the most effective

END CHECK - Checkout

Audio tape
Side 2
Time guide
30 mins

The answers and explanations for these End Checks are on Side 2 of our Audio Tape. Have your responses with you as you play this tape. As you listen you can check out how well you have done and make notes as you proceed.

2 Tutor Check

Time guide 60 mins

Read the following case incident, then deal with the accompanying questions.

Case Incident.

You are supervisor for a workteam of 15 people; 8 women and 7 men. The team have the same earnings and work a two-shift system of 7.00 a.m to 2.00 p.m and 1.00 p.m to 8.00 p.m (the overlap is to cater for handing over arrangements). The main task of you and your team is to pack items for distribution to supermarkets using a conveyor belt system. The system has variable speeds but you have established over the years that a speed of 10,000 items per hours leads to the least loss in terms of spoilt items (under 1% or 100 items) and is a comfortable rate at which to work.

Your manager comes in on Friday evening and tells you that the company has gained a large order from a supermarket chain and that this will mean that you will be required to package 12,000 items per hour, from next Wednesday.

The members of the workteam all work for £120 per week and the manager says that you can make any changes so long as you don't increase the wage bill by more than 20%.

You are not allowed any additional staff.

The main choices open to you seem to be to paying additional bouses or working overtime but you're not absolutely certain if either of these would go down well with the workteam.

Refer to the checklists in Part E as a guide and write one or two sentences against each question.

1 Do you need to take a decision? Why?

2 What are the risks involved? Could you put a figure on any of them?

3 Do you require further information before you take a decision? State a few examples of the information you might require.

4 This definitely seems like a problem. Could you think of any alternative solutions which could help? State a few.

Send to Tutor

Now get your answers to your study tutor either by post or by handing it over personally. You will receive your tutor's assessment and comment back through the post as soon as it can be managed.

3 Work Based Project

Time guide 60 mins

In this unit we have seen the need to take into account a large number of factors in order to take effective decisions.

For this project you will need to gather some information from your place of work.

1 Write down the terms of reference for your job or, if you have a job description, get a copy. State in a few sentences, the Manager to whom you report, the size and make up of your workteam and the main tasks in your job.

2 State ONE example where you follow the instructions in that particular heading:

a) no need to take a decision

b) refer the decision to someone else

c) take a decision

3 List the type of target you have in terms of

a) Cost

b) Quality

c) Quantity or Output

Try to put a figure on them if you can.

4 Refer back to our checklist in Part B.

"CHECKLIST: INFORMATION FOR TAKING DECISIONS".

Fill in the column headed "For this decision. Is it required" for the information currently available to you.

Send to tutor

Now get your anwers to your study tutor either by post or by handing it over personally. You will receive your tutor's assessment and comment back through the post as soon as it can be managed.

PART G UNIT REVIEW

1 Return to objectives

Having completed your work on this unit let's review how you feel about each of our five objectives. I will repeat them here and add comment.

You will be better able to:

* UNDERSTAND YOUR FUNCTION AS A DECISION TAKER IN YOUR WORKPLACE

If you have maintained your interest in this material and participated with me in doing most or all of the work, then you will have achieved this objective.

You will be better able to:

* LIST THE MAIN ITEMS OF INFORMATION WHICH WILL INFLUENCE THE DECISIONS YOU TAKE.

There is only one way to find out if you have met this objective - list them! If you are able to list them clearly, then you have met this objective.

You will be better able to:

* WORK THROUGH A METHOD FOR SOLVING PROBLEMS

Now that you know these, you have a sound method for solving problems. The more you use the six stages, the more of a routine it will become. You will therefore have met this objective.

You will be better able to:

* TAKE AND IMPLEMENT DECISIONS IN A WAY THAT INCREASES YOUR EFFECTIVENESS

In the work on this unit you will already have thought about how the steps listed might increase your effectiveness in taking decisions. Doing this and applying it means that you have met this objective.

I hope that this work you have done was enjoyable and useful enough to encourage you to continue your studies.

2 Extensions

I recommend that you take up as many of these extensions as you can. They will further increase your understanding and interest. You will also be able to check out a number of the ideas that I mention in the unit. The extra time and effort will prove very worthwhile.

EXTENSION 1

Book: Management: A Fresh Approach

Author: Royer Oldcorn

Publisher: Pan in collaboration with the National Extension College.

Chapter 12. A useful introduction to taking decisions and solving problems. Particularly good in identifying whether you need to take decisions in particular circumstances.

EXTENSION 2

Book: Management and Communication Studies

Author: W Bolton

Publisher: Butterworths Technician Series

Chapter 4 Decision making. Very good on creating new ideas together with some information on calculating the choices open to you in taking decisions.

EXTENSION 3

Book: People and Decisions

Author: Normal Worrall

Publisher: Longman. Understanding Business Series

The whole book is useful for getting ideas about how people work. Chapter 12 is good in introducing the ideas of probability and risk.

EXTENSION 4

Book: Supervisory Management

Author: David Evans

Publisher: Holt, Rinehart & Winston

Chapter 6, Section 6.1. This gives a concise framework for carrying out the 6 stages in problem solving.

EXTENSION 5 Book: Quality Circles: 39 in the Choice Series of Self Learning units.

Author: Ysanne Carlisle

Publisher: Northern Regional Management Centre

This unit is concerned with solving problems in the context of quality circles and goes into the techniques you can use to analyse a problem, generate ideas and select a possible solution.

These extension opportunities can all be taken up via your Support Centre.

They will either have the materials or will arrange that you have access to the materials. However, it may be more convenient to check out the materials with your personnel or training people at work - they may well give you access. There are other good reasons for approaching your own people, for example, they will become aware of your interest and you can involve them in your development.

3 References

REFERENCE 1

Book: Training for Decisions

Author: John Adair

Publisher: Gower Press

The whole book is useful on the subjects of decision-taking and problem-solving. Chapters 3 and 5 are particularly appropriate to this unit. Appendix A contains some statistical techniques for taking decisions which you might wish to follow up.

REFERENCE 2

Book: Lateral Thinking

Author: Edward de Bono

Publisher: Penguin

An informative and funny book. It opens your eyes to the possibilities available in developing alternative solutions to problems. I'd recommend it to you as general reading.

These references can all be taken up via your Support Centre. They will either have the materials or will arrange that you have access to the materials. However, check with your Personnel or Training people at work - they may well give you access. There are other good reasons for approaching your own people, for example, they will become more aware of your interest and you can involve them in your development.

If you do wish to make use of these references, then don't think that you must read them right through. Just dip into them for a slightly wider treatment of the topic raised by the unit.

I should warn you that the language and style of the writing is often difficult to cope with. So don't struggle with it too much. Do what I do when in difficulty, put the book back on the shelf and find a better one!

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